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ABSTRACT

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health created the School of the Future (SoF) project to enable selected Texas schools to coordinate and implement school-based social and health services on their campuses and to demonstrate the effectiveness of this method of service delivery by evaluating the project. The SoF operated in four sites, each with a middle school and one or two feeder elementary schools in four Texas cities: Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. The SoF brought together a variety of health and social services programs designed to enhance the well-being of the children in the target areas and their families. The information in this report, which is an explanation of project implementation rather than a how-to manual for program replication, came from surveys of coordinators, educators, service providers, parents and others who played important roles and with interviews conducted throughout the program. The implementation of a variety of social services was the program strength mentioned most often by survey respondents. Parent development was also mentioned as a major strength. Another key to SoF success was the presence of strong coordinators. The evaluation also demonstrated some challenging realities the implementation sites faced, but emphasis on program strengths probably accounts for the fact that the SoF initiatives were continued, although in altered form, after the funding period ended. (Contains 20 references.) (SLD)

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ED 415 329

Beyond the Classroom

Experiences of a School-Based Services Project

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Beyond the Classroom

Experiences of A School-Based Services Project

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October 1996

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PREFACE

A wise person once suggested that every educational or social services administrator—a position that by definition involves time spent in an office, in meetings, and on paperwork—ought to get away from the office every couple of years and spend one month in the field. They might enter the field knowledgeable about the facts and figures of the population they served; they would leave the field with their knowledge enhanced by an understanding of those facts and figures in the context of real people and real situations.

We learn from experience. But we cannot—and would not choose to—experience everything ourselves. Thus, for a variety of reasons, we learn some things through the experiences of others. And that is what led to the creation of this booklet.

For five years, we "experienced" the School of the Future (SoF). The SoF was a demonstration project initiated and funded by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health to bring needed health and social services to schools serving low-income, primarily minority students. The goal was twofold: to improve the quality of life for these youngsters and their families, and to provide a prerequisite to raising their educational potential.

Similar projects have been, and are being, carried out. All too often, however, their accomplishments are known only by those who participated in them, the lessons they imparted learned only by those who experienced them. Aware of this, the Foundation from the beginning provided funding for an extensive evaluation of the project. Here the goal was to obtain, throughout the project's first five years, both quantitative data and qualitative information on how the SoF worked and what it accomplished. Through an analysis of the data and a synthesis of interviews with the participants—executives, providers, school personnel, parents, and children—we were able to experience the project in the field. Furthermore, with four pilot sites—a cluster of one or two elementary schools and a middle school in each of four Texas cities—we were able to learn from not one but four discrete experiences, for

each site involved different populations in different types of communities with various needs and problems and, in turn, different ways of addressing them.

The lessons we learned have little to do with carrying out specific tasks. "How to" manuals are available that explain, in detail, how to develop an advisory board, for example, or set up a child care program. What we have learned has more to do with such basic issues as recognizing, acknowledging, and dealing with reality. If, by imparting what we have learned from our experiences, we can help others improve the lives of children and their families, we will consider our efforts worthwhile.

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INTRODUCTION

Are you familiar with the School of the Future? Some of you may know a great deal about it, while others may have an idea of what it is; a majority, however, probably are curious and would like to learn more. Following are the questions we hear most frequently, along with responses to help clarify what the SoF is all about.

- What is the School of the Future?
  The SoF brings together a variety of health and social services on public school campuses, where services can reach and be coordinated to fully serve children in need and their families.

- Why was it created?
  For many children, the problems of growing up are overwhelming. Social problems that formerly seemed circumscribed—child abuse, substance ābuse, teen pregnancy, gangs, violence—have increased in prevalence and severity. Terms and issues that formerly were shocking now seem almost commonplace.

  Almost as overwhelming as these problems has been trying to find ways to overcome them. Many organizations have tried. Although most programs were well-meant and often well-conducted, the outcome has been an array of fragmented services with different requirements and regulations, limited ability to reach the target population, and, in the long run, failure to help the children and families they were designed to serve.

  The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health tried a different approach. To help improve the lives of Texas children and at the same time circumvent the problems created by so many single-focus and uncoordinated programs, it developed the School of the Future.

- How was the project funded?
  The Foundation pledged $1 million to support the SoF in four sites for five years—$50,000 per year for each site. An additional $1 million was set aside to conduct an ongoing project evaluation.

- When and where did the project take place?
  The SoF was funded as a demonstration project from 1990 to 1995. It was implemented in four Texas cities—Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. Each site consisted of a middle school and one or two of its feeder elementary schools in a low-income, primarily ethnic-minority neighborhood. The same broad goals were addressed at each site. However, there was no prescribed, cookie-cutter approach to selecting or obtaining services or reaching the specified goals. Each site was to develop the project on the basis of its community's needs and resources.

- Was this a new idea?
  School-based services were not new in 1990. The SoF grew out of the work of Dr. James Comer and Dr. Edward Zigler of Yale University, both of whom have long advocated an expanded role for schools. The innovative aspect of the SoF was to employ a project coordinator for each site who would be responsible for everything from assessing community needs to arranging for and coordinating services.

- What were the project's goals?
  Overall goals were to provide prevention and intervention programs in mental health, physical health, and personal enrichment. The goals focused on four populations:
  - Children - to improve the physical and mental health of students and their families.
  - Families - to increase positive interaction between family members and their children and to increase parent involvement in their children's education.
  - Schools - to increase the number of available and affordable services for neighborhood residents and to create a supportive school environment for students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community partners.
  - Communities - to improve the image of the school in the community and to integrate school and community activities.

- How did you evaluate the project?
  We conducted two types of evaluation: quantitative, to measure outcomes in such areas as school climate, student self-concept, and teacher perception; and qualitative, to describe the process of development and determine how the participants—educators, providers, and clients—perceived the project in both process and outcome.

- How did the project work out?
  One answer could be that, when Foundation funding came to an end, all of the key players at each site sought—and found—funds that enabled them to continue the SoF. Other responses are more complex.

Explaining the complex process of project implementation is what this booklet is all about. This is not a "how to" manual. We have given no directions for how to obtain funds, set up programs, or conduct an evaluation. This type of information is available elsewhere. Rather, we have tried to convey what we learned in the course of project implementation so that others can benefit from our experiences, both positive and otherwise.

The information that follows is based on an analysis of the qualitative evaluation, which consisted of the following:

1. Two surveys, one conducted near the beginning and one near the end of the project. Survey information was collected from key informants, that is, coordinators, school principals, teachers, service providers, parents, and others who played important roles. Questions focused on project strengths and weaknesses, perceptions of the SoF in concept and practice, and opportunities for project continuation and expansion.
2. A series of interviews conducted at regular intervals over the five-year funding period. Interviews were conducted with the coordinators every two or three months and, less frequently, with school principals and school district liaisons to obtain an ongoing record of the tasks, duties, barriers, and accomplishments that comprised the process of development.
3. On-site observation.
4. Review of SoF-related correspondence and minutes of meetings.

What we learned about project implementation were not lessons of great magnitude. Rather, much as many steps are needed to build a staircase, these lessons form the many steps which, together, are needed to create a successful project. Information gleaned from the evaluation of our SoF experiences is proving useful to the Foundation and the demonstration sites. We hope it also will prove useful for the educators, community leaders, local government administrators, agency directors, and concerned citizens who might be interested in starting a School of the Future or some other form of school-based or school-linked services to help children and families in their communities.

PROJECT RATIONALE

Recognizing a Need

For many youngsters born in the final decades of the twentieth century, the task of growing up is overwhelming. Children of single-parent families living in impoverished neighborhoods must deal on a daily basis with such problems as substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, teen pregnancy, and school failure and dropping out—problems that many adults know of only through watching television or reading the newspaper.

These problems have not been ignored. Aware of the increase in prevalence and severity of the difficulties facing children and their families, educational and social service organizations and agencies have developed a variety of programs to deal with these problems. Although many of the programs have helped the populations they target, they have resulted in a bewildering array of requirements and regulations, fragmented services, ineffective service delivery, short-term efforts, and—perhaps most discouragingly—failure to provide comprehensive or sustained help for the children and families they were intended to serve.

Determining an Intervention

The Hogg Foundation created the School of the Future (SoF) as a demonstration project designed to help improve the lives of Texas children in need and at the same time circumvent the problems created by so many diverse, single-focus, and uncoordinated existing programs.

The SoF was closely aligned with the Foundation's mission: to develop "a broad mental health program for bringing great benefits to the people of Texas." Focusing on public schools' access to children and their potential for helping children and their families was viewed as a practical and contemporary way to help carry out this mission. The project was based on solid theo-

ry and practice, growing out of the work of Dr. James Comer and Dr. Edward Zigler, both of Yale University and leaders in advocating an expanded role for schools in meeting the needs of children and their families.

GETTING STARTED

> At a meeting recently on school-based services, one woman—intelligent, well-read, concerned about children—was overjoyed when she heard about the School of the Future. "What a wonderful idea," she said. "All we need to do is get the legislature to pass a law that every school district in the state must start a project like that."

Would that it were so simple. Complex problems demand more than simple solutions. The collaboration required to assemble a variety of health and social services on a public school campus goes beyond bringing a given service into a school. To initiate a program of after-school care, for example, cooperation is needed—a cooperative agreement between the school principal and the service provider. Arrangements must be made for time, space, equipment, safety, and parent contact. Coordination is called for—working out the sharing of space and equipment, for example, or planning special events. Beyond that, a school-based service project calls for a change within the school system itself. Traditionally, schools are autonomous. For school-based services, school administrators must be willing to give up some autonomy and take a collaborative approach in which different agencies—public and private as well as the school and school district—share their expertise, ownership of problems, responsibilities, and vision of the goal itself.[1] No matter how great the need and how sound the idea, considerable effort and time are required before a new school-based project can be in a position to offer its first service.

"Selling" the Project

Before a major initiative in the schools can begin, key persons in the community—civic and business leaders, city and county officials, and, most important, school district leaders—must be sold on the proposed project. They must be informed about it and convinced that it would be beneficial and feasible for

[1]*Cooperation, Coordination, & Collaboration.* (February 1996). Austin: Texas Children's Mental Health Plan.

their community as well as worth the cost. Their acceptance—and sometimes their financial support—is essential before a project can begin.

Major organizations such as foundations and state agencies usually have a foot in the door. Their administrators not only know whom to contact, either directly or through colleagues who have contacts, but also they tend to be acquainted personally with the community's leaders and potential funding sources. In practice, however, most projects are not initiated by a state or foundation but are created at a mid-management level, where those developing them must navigate through the upper levels of bureaucracy for money and approval. If the project creators with the vision are at the grass-roots level, it is likely that they do not know the community's leaders and are hesitant and unsure how to approach them.

The SoF Experience

The School of the Future had an unusual beginning. First, it had guaranteed funding. With the approval of its executive board, the Hogg Foundation set aside $1 million to fund a five-year demonstration project of school-based services in four Texas cities—$50,000 per year at each site. Concomitant with that, it set aside an additional $1 million to conduct a full-scale evaluation of the project. In addition, the Foundation had the reputation and the clout to get the attention of community leaders at each of the demonstration sites before the project began in order to explain the SoF and get the approval of these key persons, if not their whole-hearted enthusiasm.

With committed funds and ready access to city and school leaders, the project began with a top-down approach. Working with his executive committee, the Foundation's president selected four cities as potential demonstration sites. The first step was to contact colleagues in those cities to ascertain whether key decision makers might be receptive to the idea. Next, he and other Foundation executives met with community leaders, individually and collectively, to outline the concept of the SoF and solicit their input. They also contacted school district superintendents to explain the project and determine the district's interest in participating.

The specific approach differed in each city. In one site, for example, the Foundation president met with the mayor, county commissioner, school superintendent, county judge, juvenile court judge, and representatives of major social service agencies. These officials were supportive from the beginning. They saw

the project as an opportunity to assess the needs of an at-risk community and, because the project had a built-in evaluation component, to determine the effectiveness of this kind of initiative in meeting the neighborhood's needs.

Despite this show of support, the school board at this site rejected the project when it was first proposed. The concern—a common one when nonacademic and nontraditional projects are introduced in an educational setting—was that it would increase the number of people on the independent school district (ISD) payroll and would require so much energy and so many resources that it would be more of a burden than a benefit. The proposal-writing team, which was composed of both school district and Hogg Foundation staff, then met with school board members to explain the project to them and convince them of its merits. The second time the proposal was brought to the board, it was approved unanimously.

At another site, the timing was right. The district had been looking into the possibility of instituting school-based services, and the SoF seemed to fit into their plans. To demonstrate community support, the district liaison obtained the names of parent leaders from the school principals at the potential project site, then worked with these parents so they would be prepared to represent the schools at a meeting with the superintendent and, later, to present the SoF proposal to the school board. The parents did their job well, and the project was approved.

At the third site, a mental health counselor had been supported in the projected site's middle school for several years through HF funding to a local family service center. The center's director was enthusiastic about expanding this service, but he deemed it essential to have someone from the school administration serve as liaison to the project to keep communication open with the district and assure its continuing support. The district agreed, appointing the assistant superintendent for student services to that position. She favored school-based services, and with her support the school board quickly approved the project.

At the fourth site, an administrator in the state's education agency who also served on the Foundation's Commission on Children and Families had spoken on his own initiative to the superintendent about the proposed project. This positive introduction, along with Foundation executives' visits to the superintendent, elementary school principal, and representatives of neighborhood service agencies, paved the way for the chief administrator's support. Once the project's concept was accepted and approved by officials in the selected

school districts, the SoF moved to the local, or grass roots, level to get the project under way.

Our experience showed . . .

The reality is that most groups do not start with the funds or the contacts of a foundation. A group is far more likely to have the vision but lack the resources and influence of a major organization. This does not mean that you cannot develop a successful school-based service project without major financial support from the beginning; it does mean that you will have to work harder. Fund-raising has become a profession in itself and must be addressed before a project can get off the ground. For most groups, a preliminary step is called for: to bring together persons and organizations that might be interested in working together to achieve the same goal.

Building Support

Forming a coalition of like-minded people has a number of advantages. It brings together persons of diverse interests, knowledge, and influence, informs them about the proposed project, and helps develop their interest and support. It builds community interest and a sense of commitment to the community. It expands the ideas, the contacts, the resources, and the funds that can be gathered to help start the project.

> The Hogg Foundation gave credibility, legitimacy to the project.
> — School District Liaison

It is useful to have as many local groups as possible represented in a coalition. The participants don't have to agree on everything, just on the special problem or project that has brought them together. In addition to groups recognized as interested in the community's children—child care associations, for example, or children's protective agencies—you should not overlook persons or organizations that might become interested if they could take part in the planning and become personally involved. Law enforcement agencies, physicians, attorneys, and local businesses and industries are among the groups and individuals that might have an interest in children, albeit from different perspectives. Furthermore, representatives of these groups may provide access to

school and city administrators whose support is crucial to the project. Don't forget parents and grandparents. They have a lot at stake, and their insight and support can be invaluable.

There is, of course, more to gaining support than knowing the people at the top. Local neighborhood support is crucial for a community project to succeed. Businesses and health and social service agencies in the neighborhood as well as local school administrators and teachers must be encouraged to "buy in" to the project. Prior to the SoF's implementation, Foundation staff visited each site a number of times to meet with local service agencies and school personnel. Their goal was to explain the project so that they could dispel the rumors that tend to arise about a new initiative. As one Foundation liaison noted, "My work at the front end did away with some myths and misconceptions about duplication of services and fears that the Hogg Foundation was going to supplant the efforts of local organizations and charge for services. It took time to talk to all the players, to reassure them and clarify our goals and plans." This initial, front-end effort must be built in to any project of school-based services, whatever its specific objectives and methodology might be.

Our experience showed . . .

Building good working relationships—gaining understanding, acceptance, and support at all levels and eliminating real or potential misconceptions and fears from the start—takes time, perhaps more time and effort than almost any other aspect of a project. Be patient and persevere. The effort and time spent up front often determines the acceptance and, in turn, the success of a project.

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THE KEY PLAYERS

Selecting the Coordinator

The project coordinator is the key to the School of the Future. This is the person who is responsible for project administration, service and community outreach, and public relations. Beyond the obvious responsibilities—planning, organizing, developing management procedures, coordinating programs, raising funds, promoting the project, and facilitating evaluation—the coordinator sets the tone of the project. It is up to the coordinators to gain the acceptance and support of the school principals and teachers, an ongoing task considering the mobility rate of school personnel. They must gain the acceptance of agency leaders, convincing them of the desirability of working collaboratively with educators as well as providing services in a school setting. They must solicit the interest of parents, for parents and families are the clients the project is designed to serve. And they must develop community networks and relationships, for school-based services extend beyond a given school to serve, and sometimes unite, an entire community.

A potential problem with school-based social services is that they can increase the work load of school administrators and faculty. Already busy with academic concerns, teachers and staff too often have to serve as social workers for children in need of help, locating services that they need, then following through to see that they get them. A major role of the SoF coordinator is to relieve the school principal, faculty, and staff of these social work tasks. That role is perceived as critical. Without a coordinator, most school personnel agree that the SoF project would not work.

In light of the large number of people-related tasks, it may come as no surprise that key players at each of the sites listed interpersonal skills and personal characteristics as the most essential skills of the coordinators. This was the consensus of respondents to the Key Informant Survey, which listed as primary attributes personality and the ability to work with many types of people—

families, city leaders, school staff, and agency personnel. Additional attributes considered important were the ability to develop trust and credibility, be sensitive to and understanding of problems, and be a good listener, a facilitator, a team player, and sincere. Personality and a can-do attitude also were perceived as essential.[2]

An understanding of the community and its political and cultural environment was considered invaluable for coordinators, along with knowledge of school systems, agencies, resources, and funding sources. Education and work experience, communications skills, leadership ability, and networking skills, though cited as important, were perceived as secondary to interpersonal skills.

The SoF Experience

Each site was responsible for hiring its own coordinator, and each put considerable thought into the selection process. Because the position was a new one, there were no guidelines or job descriptions to follow. Basic skills for directing a social service program seemed a given, and due to the demographics of the selected areas, three of the four sites hoped to find someone who was bilingual and bicultural as well as adept at organizing and managing a program. Beyond that, each site had individual interests and concerns based in part on the needs of the community, in part on the persons doing the selecting.

> You need someone to oversee, to make decisions, to see the wholeness of it, to make it work. I don't believe anything would exist without the coordinator.
>
> — Middle School Counselor

One site, for example, sought an individual who was knowledgeable about the school system but was not a part of it, while another site was more interested in finding someone who worked within the school system and would be able to help integrate the SoF in schools throughout the district. One wanted a person proficient in grass-roots organizing, another sought one with proven commitment to the community.

[2] For a full description of coordinator tasks and responsibilities and an analysis of essential and preferred coordinator characteristics, see *The Project Coordinators: A Key to the School of the Future*. (1995). Austin: Hogg Foundation for Mental Health.

After due consideration, two men and two women were hired as project coordinators. Two were Hispanic, one African-American, and one Anglo. Three were social workers, two of whom had master's degrees, and one was a teacher and special education administrator. All had had from 15 to 30 years experience in the field.

Coordinators were given no advice or training about how to obtain or deliver services to parents and students at a school site. Their primary guideline was a concept paper developed by SoF staff at the Hogg Foundation to give them a general idea of what the Foundation would like to see result over a five-year period. Furthermore, although each of the coordinators was experienced in working with social service programs, they differed in their knowledge and experience in fund raising, project promotion, working within a school system, and juggling so many tasks at one time. There were no precedents to follow. Thus, they had to improvise, and they had to have a combination of flexibility and perseverance to make the job—and the project—work.

Although the coordinators brought different strengths to their work and approached their roles differently, they shared two distinctive accomplishments. One was the fact that each stayed with the project throughout the five years, a rare occurrence for programs on limited funding. The other was the tremendous esteem in which each was held. By the end of the project, the key players surveyed—from school principals to families to community leaders—could picture no one else as coordinator at their respective sites.

This view was borne out by the Key Informant Surveys. The traits and skills cited as important by the respondents reflected the traits and skills that each of the coordinators exemplified. Very few of the respondents listed specific skills needed. Rather, they focused on the broad traits and abilities, such as flexibility and creativity, that would enable the coordinators to handle the many different aspects of their positions.

The coordinators' perspectives on skills most important for serving successfully in their positions were right in line with those of the persons with whom they worked. They, too, considered interpersonal or "people" skills essential, along with the need for an understanding and knowledge of the schools, the community, and local service agencies. Experience, the ability to communicate, and being a doer also were traits and skills they considered essential.

Our experience showed . . .

The coordinator is the unique aspect of the SoF and the key figure in this school-based services project. This is the person who relieves the school staff of social work responsibilities, serves as a liaison between the school and community, and brings in programs to help children and their families improve their quality of life and their potential for learning. The selection of the coordinator is crucial to the successful implementation of the project.

Working with School and Community Leaders

The coordinators were crucial to the project, but they did not work alone. Other key players at each site included school district personnel—principals, administrators, board members, teachers, counselors—as well as community leaders, parents, program partners, and service providers. These were the people with whom the coordinators worked most closely and who were influential, to varying degrees, in the development of the project.

School administrators often have concerns about new projects, especially about projects that do not give promise of directly improving academic standing. For one thing, they are used to the vagaries of funding and have seen programs on time-bound support come and go, often without living up to expectations. For another, if they are not included in a project's initial plans and negotiations, they are less knowledgeable about the program, less involved in it, and less likely to support it. Some administrators dislike the idea of mental health services in a school setting, fearing that such services imply a focus on pathology rather than education and that service providers do not understand the stresses and constraints of education in the public schools. Many are concerned about increased work—paperwork for the teachers, for example, and longer hours for the custodians. A major task, therefore, especially during the project's first year, was to acquaint school personnel with the SoF and convince them of its value.

The SoF Experience

- **School principals**

At the start, 10 principals participated in the SoF, and their views of mental health and attitudes toward school-based services made a difference in how the

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project was implemented and accepted not only at each site but at each school, as well. Those who believed in the project conveyed that belief to their faculty and staff, making them more open to new, nonacademic programs on the school campus. One principal showed her support of the project by giving the coordinator an office adjoining her own and sitting in on meetings called by the coordinator. Another not only arranged for space in the school for carrying out services but also served as a liaison with the school district, stressing to the administration the importance of the work being done by the project.

As one site coordinator noted, the development of school-based services continued to be a high priority primarily due to the efforts of the two school principals. Both of these schools were able to bring in a number of programs and to gain the interest of their students' families and of the community.

> You have to trust all those strangers in your school doing their own thing.
>
> — Principal

In contrast, some principals initially were bothered or confused by lines of authority and responsibility for the programs while others feared that their influence would be diminished, and these issues had to be settled early in the project. At schools in which the principals remained less than enthusiastic, the project had difficulty getting started. The influence of administrators and the difference they could make became evident when some of the principals were replaced. The project was never as cohesive at one elementary school after the first principal was transferred to another campus. In contrast, the new principal at a middle school became one of the strongest advocates and most effective players in the project.

- **School district administrators**

In the beginning, each site was assigned a liaison with the school district. This person was in a position to maintain the visibility of the project at the district level, manage questions and complaints directed to the district, protect the project's resources, and help develop additional resources. Three of the liaisons were high enough in the administration to communicate effectively about the project, lobby for it, and in one site, make district-wide decisions. At the fourth site, a

school principal who had close ties with the district office served in that position. As with principals, liaisons tended to move to new positions. One liaison who stayed the course at her site was credited, along with the coordinator and the director of a local family service agency, with the successful development of the project. She kept the school board informed and supportive, related opportunities for programs and funding to the coordinator, and helped keep enthusiasm and momentum going for the SoF. Her involvement was considered crucial by the coordinator and other key players.

> You can do little in isolation. You're always on the outside unless you have an "in" with the big system.
>
> — Coordinator

In contrast, the site whose liaison was not replaced when she left was never able to develop a close working relationship with the ISD central administration and the school board, making relationships bumpier and the acquisition and flow of funds more difficult.

- **Community leaders**

Each site developed its own core of supporters. Two community activists, both of whom had children in a project school and who benefited from their association with the coordinator, on several occasions spoke up for the SoF at school board and city council meetings. The president of a neighborhood association, whose children were grown, served on the advisory board, used her skills and influence to obtain program funding, and promoted the project throughout the city. The director of a social service agency that managed the project at one site was influential and helpful to the coordinator throughout the project.

The president of the primary funding agency, the Hogg Foundation, was acknowledged as a strong, positive influence by each of the sites. He used his organizational and personal contacts to get the project started, and he stepped in on two occasions when negative media were having an adverse effect. A frequent comment from the various key players was that Foundation clout, both individual and organizational, was a determining factor in the project's success.

Our experience showed . . .

Developing and maintaining good working relationships with key players in the school system is essential for a school-based social services project. For a nonacademic project to be accepted in a school, it must have at least the tacit support of the principal. Principals are responsible for their schools, from test scores to building safety. If they favor a project, they can help remove barriers to its implementation; if they oppose it, even the best project cannot succeed. Although one can develop a system of school-based services without a school-system liaison, it is extremely beneficial to have a person high in the administration to represent such a project at the district level.

THE FIRST STEPS

Having guaranteed funding for five years, the Hogg Foundation recommended that each site devote the first year of the project to planning. This was perceived as a way of gaining community support, determining needs, and handling program logistics prior to actually bringing nonacademic services into educational institutions.

The coordinators faced a daunting number of tasks at the beginning of the SoF project. One of the first was to locate space for potential services. Also crucial those first months was the need to establish credibility. New projects tend to start frequently in the public schools, then end when the funding runs out. Teachers were skeptical. Under constant pressure to increase student achievement and attendance, they were concerned that the SoF project, like so many others, would mean additional work for them without lasting long enough to result in academic gains for their students. Some of the principals were equally skeptical, especially if they had not been consulted about the project before it began. Local agencies, many of which were financially stretched, let it be known that they were not enthusiastic about relocating their services or sharing their clients with other providers. The broader community, for the most part, was indifferent. These various groups had to be convinced of the project's potential value.

Community needs, though they might seem obvious to knowledgeable outsiders, had to be voiced by the local families themselves for the project to best serve the students. Thus, it was important to conduct a needs assessment of neighborhood residents to learn their perspectives on how to improve the status of children and their families.

Soon another problem became evident. As the coordinators began their year of planning, three of the four sites quickly found that they could not afford that luxury. One coordinator realized this when, six months after the project had begun, one of the principals asked, "When will the project start?" With the dire need for services, along with the need to develop trust and credibility, the coordinators felt pressure to produce programs quickly that were useful, visible, and easy to get started. Recreation programs filled the bill at a couple of sites. Only one site, with extensive space in a former mall that was being renovated to house future services, was able to devote the first year to planning. To meet these immediate and diverse tasks that first year, the coordinators from the beginning had to demonstrate superior interpersonal skills along with a knowledge of the school system and community, an understanding of the target population, strong organizational ability, and the motivation to put forth the extra time and effort required to get this multifaceted project underway.

Finding Space

A major concern in many public schools is lack of space. At the SoF sites, most of the schools were overcrowded at the beginning of the project, and enrollment kept increasing. In addition to the problem of space itself is the fact that bringing outside services into schools puts an increasing strain on the infrastructure. Additional programs and personnel require school staff to bolster security, monitor people entering and leaving the school, and respond to an increased number of questions and requests ranging from "Where's the health center?" to queries about the different services available. Keeping the campus open at night and during other nontraditional school hours calls for additional staff for cleanup and security and increases the use of utilities.

Persons not employed by the school district must be aware first of all of the bottom line: the principal is responsible for the school. As one administrator said, "The principal will take the heat, no matter who does something. Permission to bring services into a school depends on how much risk a principal will take."

The SoF Experience

With the exception of the one site with a former shopping mall in which to house its services, finding room in overcrowded schools for a project coordi-

nator's office and social service programs was a major problem. The coordinators approached the space problem in different ways and with varying degrees of success. At one site, the coordinator sought to get the school district to release the principals from responsibility for the buildings when they were used by the project while school was not in session, but to no avail. One site obtained a portable building for a health clinic; another tried to obtain approval for temporary buildings but was unsuccessful. The most common approach was to create alternative uses for existing space, turning a closet into an office, for example, or arranging for room sharing for programs that were conducted at different times. Only rarely were programs put on hold because there was no place for them.

> Lack of space is a barrier only if you are narrow-minded or want to keep a program out.
>
> — School Principal

The principal who saw challenges rather than barriers proved his point by offering room for a Head Start program on the middle-school grounds, thus solving the program's previously fruitless efforts to find space in the school's community. Though unusual, the location was a convenient one, located across the street from an elementary school. As the principal pointed out, the program offered parents of preschool children a friendly and positive view of the middle school that their children would attend one day.

Our experience showed . . .

Especially in inner-city schools, finding space for health and social services should be recognized as an ongoing problem, one that can best be met by working cooperatively with school district administrators, principals, and service providers to find creative ways to house new and expanded programs.

Establishing Credibility

• Gaining School Acceptance

The first priority for teachers is academics. Although a number of teachers saw the SoF as providing the support services that make greater academic achievement possible, the project was not their priority. Some didn't understand the concept; others found it disruptive to have students pulled out of class to attend counseling or therapy programs. Many worried that it would create even more work for them. Furthermore, because they had not been asked for their thoughts or suggestions regarding the SoF, teachers generally felt that it was not their project and they had no obligation to help it succeed.

The SoF Experience

To overcome the school personnel's skepticism of "just another plan that wouldn't accomplish much" and encourage support of the project, the first step across sites was to show the faculty and staff how the project could serve them.

In one site, for example, the coordinator not only explained the project and its goals at faculty meetings but also participated in teacher workdays to show her willingness to work with and be a part of the staff. Initially, she had asked the teachers to be responsible for explaining the individual programs, sending flyers home, recommending students to participate, obtaining parental permission, and so forth every time a new service joined the project. When it became apparent that the teachers, already overcommitted in time and duties, were overwhelmed by these time-consuming tasks, she combined and condensed the various referral forms into one general form that could be filled out once a year, eliminating considerable work. When the teachers still complained of SoF demands, the coordinator asked the service providers to take responsibility for student recruitment, a system that worked well and gained teacher support.

> There are two types of teachers: those who say a child doesn't need extra help from a short-term program—basically, 'I was here before the project began and I'll be here after it ends'—and those who see the project as a collaborative effort to help children who need it.
>
> — Teacher

The elementary school principal at the same site indicated her support of the project by providing an office next to her own for the coordinator, and she further encouraged teacher acceptance by personally attending project-related meetings and enabling school facilities to be used in the afternoon and evening for SoF programs. The coordinator gained additional support when, at the end of the first year, she presented the results of the parent survey to the faculty. This proved to be an eye opener for the teachers, and it helped them better understand the students and their families and see the importance of school-based health and human services and community outreach.

Another coordinator met individually as well as collectively with faculty at each school to get their views on the major needs of the students. He used these times to explain the project and to help the teachers understand their role in it. At a middle school the principal, through his outspoken support of the project, and the counselor, through her work with the students, helped break down teacher resentment and gain their confidence. While some school counselors and nurses helped the project become accepted, others felt threatened by service providers who came to the schools from outside agencies. Some worried that they would be replaced or that their services would no longer be needed. In reality, this was unlikely as the needs in these schools were so great. To overcome these concerns, coordinators at each site sought ways to include regular school staff in decision making by having them serve on student assistance committees, for example, or act as primary referral sources. Most of the staff found, in time, that having additional counselors or health clinics on campus helped lighten the load of the regular personnel.

In contrast to the other sites, the project based in the former mall had little contact with teachers and the community the first year. Here the coordinator worked closely and met often with the school district liaison and the director of students services. She met regularly with the principals, who for some time felt left out because they hadn't been included in the project's initial design, as well as with the four parent representatives who had been in on the project from the beginning. She also spent time with agency personnel who were potential service providers on site and with construction persons who were renovating the mall. Because the project at this site was more school linked than school based, the coordinator had less contact with teachers throughout the project than did the coordinators at the other sites.

Our experience showed . . .

It is essential to recognize the many demands made upon teachers, especially in schools with low academic rank, and to find ways to make sure that project demands do not place additional or unnecessary burdens on the faculty. The support of the teachers and staff is essential. Although they alone cannot enable a project to succeed, they can effectively undermine it.

• Gaining Community Acceptance

To counter the communities' traditional distrust of schools and encourage their participation, the coordinators considered it essential for community members not only to hear about the project but also to see that it was productive and worthwhile. Thus, they each devoted a considerable portion of the first year to selling the SoF to both the school and the community.

The SoF Experience

To acquaint the community with the project, one coordinator devoted a great deal of time to making presentations to school and neighborhood groups such as the PTA, churches, and community organizations as well as local agencies and service providers in an effort to elicit their understanding and support. To show that the project offered more than promises, she brought in several small programs, such as after-school activities, that agencies were prepared to put in place quickly, that parents would appreciate, and that children would enjoy. For faculty and staff she provided lunch-hour workshops on such relevant issues as working with parents, and for the entire community she initiated a health fair. These activities gave visible proof that the SoF was a viable effort that delivered what it promised for the benefit of the school and the community.

Another coordinator focused on families, meeting with a large number of parents to help them develop self-esteem and empowerment as well as ownership in the project. He met with faculty at each school to solicit their views on the major needs of the students, worked to establish ties with local social services, and encouraged the involvement of businesses and agencies by arranging luncheons for their representatives.

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The negative image of the middle school at that site presented a barrier to project credibility when the SoF began. Because of a history of race riots at the school, counselors at the feeder elementary schools had been encouraging parents to send their children to one of the city's magnet schools rather than the local facility, and the resulting "brain drain" had further damaged the middle school's reputation. The coordinator, along with the principal, used their information meetings about the project as an opportunity to reverse that image by promoting the school to the community in a positive light.

Effective services in one instance gave the wrong impression of the project. Here the coordinator spent so much time responding to requests for food, clothing, housing, and health care that school staff and the community alike thought that the project was established to meet basic needs. In the orientation meetings he held to introduce the project to the faculty, he had to explain what the SoF was not, as well as what it was, in order to correct the prevailing image. Despite the project's avowed purpose, however, the coordinator spent the first few months not only providing basic necessities but also helping resolve crises such as arrests, deportations, and medical emergencies.

A number of community services already existed in this site's neighborhood. To make families aware of these services as well as to gain agency support, the coordinator met with representatives of the various programs and then produced a directory of services available to neighborhood residents. He and the principal promoted the project tirelessly in the school and community throughout the first year to gain understanding, acceptance, and cooperation.

Our experience showed . . .

By their very nature, school-based services extend beyond the school to the families of students and the community at large. For this reason, community awareness and acceptance are essential if the project is to succeed. Program directors should recognize that building awareness and obtaining support are difficult and time-consuming tasks, especially in communities where many families are distrustful of schools and uncomfortable around them.

Coordinating the Players

One way to attract participation and support as well as to develop collaboration is to involve the clients, the support staff, and representatives of the service providers in some type of decision-making function. The challenge for the SoF was to create governing bodies structured enough to put various program components in place in an organized and timely way, and at the same time flexible enough to promote a sense of community ownership of the project.

The SoF Experience

Early in the project, each site set up two types of committees, one an advisory group to involve the community in planning and decision making, the other a working group to identify and serve the children most in need of help.

Typical advisory groups consisted of key project personnel, parents, and representatives of city services and agencies such as the parks and recreation department and the juvenile court. However, even when the community was receptive to the coordinator personally and to the program in general, it took time to recruit advisory committee members. Parents often were hesitant and providers busy. Furthermore, this was not a one-time task. At each SoF site, committee members changed frequently due to the mobility and time restrictions of the participants, school staff, and parents. The composition and purpose of these groups also changed as the project evolved.

For program management, coordinators either brought together the relevant professionals for staffing cases—school administrator, nurse, counselor, teacher representative, etc.—or built upon existing consultation groups or student assistance teams. The idea was to use a team approach, with professionals from different disciplines working together to help a child and his family rather than individualized, more traditional efforts at remediation.

Our experience showed . . .

Bringing people together to share in decision making not only provided direction but also helped different groups accept and buy into the project. Especially in the first year, such committees helped establish the project on each campus.

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Determining Needs

The first major activity at each site served as a foundation for both planning and trust-building: a community needs assessment. The needs of children and their families are great in low-income, primarily minority communities and tend to focus on similar issues: child care, health care, violence prevention, and employment. However, neighborhoods differ in specific needs as well as in existing resources. The coordinators wanted to learn what the local residents considered crucial issues and needs in their respective communities. They saw this not only as a way to hear the perspectives of the project's potential participants, but also as an opportunity to meet families and acquaint them with the new project. Each site, therefore, considered it important to conduct a needs assessment early in the project so that the survey could serve as a process for building advocacy as well as defining needs.

> The community survey armed us with what we needed to bring in the right kind of services. We're still using it for that purpose.
>
> — Coordinator

The SoF Experience

Differences in how the coordinators handled the needs assessments gave an early indication of the flexibility of the SoF and its adaptability to different types of communities and management styles. The coordinator at one site, for example, participated actively in the survey, knocking on doors and spending time in the neighborhood laundromat, a general gathering place, to meet and talk to area residents. Later, because leaders at this site were inexperienced in survey analyses, she obtained technical assistance from a research associate at the funding organization to analyze the information obtained.

Two of the sites conducted two surveys each. At one, the coordinator personally carried out an informal survey of families who were obtaining counseling services in an ongoing program at the middle school. This was followed by a community-wide survey in which a local service agency supervised volunteer interviewers. At the other, a small family survey by a social work

intern was followed by a more extensive survey conducted by volunteers who were trained and supervised by the coordinator.

In contrast, one coordinator did not participate in the survey at all. Rather, the school district contracted with a youth-group leader experienced in conducting needs assessments to develop the questionnaire. He, in turn, used members of his neighborhood youth organization to conduct the interviews.

The information sought was similar across the sites and included questions about community strengths and weaknesses, demographics, the kinds of problems the respondents faced, and the types of services they needed or wanted. One effective approach was to personalize the questions, asking the respondents what problems they themselves had encountered rather than what major problems they thought existed in the community.

Our experience showed . . .

The needs assessment effectively served two purposes. Not only was it used to learn the needs of the community as perceived or experienced by the residents, but also it proved to be a useful vehicle for meeting families, informing them about the project, and encouraging their support. For projects lacking in survey expertise, you might look to local resources such as high schools and colleges to provide technical assistance. This approach can have the added advantage of building community support.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

A basic goal of the SoF was to help families help their children by (1) increasing the interaction between family members and their students and (2) increasing parent involvement in the schools. As others have learned, these are no easy tasks. Getting parents and families involved proved to be a continuing challenge throughout the first five years.

The primary barriers to parent participation in schools are widely recognized and documented, and these were the barriers faced by the demonstration sites. For one thing, a large number of families in low-income areas consist of single, working parents and parents holding more than one job, leaving them virtually no time to participate in school activities. Others, because they are unem-

ployed, uneducated, or do not speak English well, often lack the confidence to participate in schools or feel they have nothing to contribute. Many have unpleasant memories of their own schooling and are loath to set foot in a school; some don't trust the schools because their only contacts have been when their children were in trouble. Furthermore, parents, just as teachers, have seen programs come and go and are skeptical of new initiatives. Each new program has to recognize this and start from the beginning to try to develop trust.

> Parent involvement? A few teachers don't want parents around as they create too much work, but others see the value and enable parents to work as aides in their classes.
>
> — Teacher

Communication about available services is another problem. Much communication is handled through the children, who are given flyers or messages to take home about upcoming classroom activities or events. Often the messages are considered unimportant or tossed aside, if they ever make it home at all. Communication with teachers can be another barrier. According to the project's Key Informant Surveys, many parents think teachers talk down to them or ignore them. Communication may be complicated by cultural barriers. As one coordinator pointed out, by way of example: "When a Hispanic parent doesn't want to leave a child at the door the first day of school, it is unlikely that she is bucking authority. What teachers may not understand is that she feels it her duty to stay with the child in the classroom a few days, that it would hurt him to just leave him at the door."

Teachers, in turn, tend to be ambivalent about parent involvement. Many, frustrated by parents' apparent lack of concern and low amount of participation, would like to see more families become involved in the schools in some way. On the other hand, when parents come to class or contact teachers to find out how and what their children are doing, or when they need help themselves before they can assist their children with homework, it consumes a great deal of time. Thus, although they favor involvement in principle, teachers also see a need to limit it because of time and energy constraints.

The SoF Experience

Parent Volunteer Program. Strengthening families was a priority at one site, and the active parent group that evolved exemplifies both the positive and the negative aspects of involving parents in the schools. Early in the project, the coordinator used the community needs assessment as a recruitment tool, asking parents who were being surveyed if they would like to become active in their children's school. Those who responded positively were invited to become parent volunteers.

At the first volunteer meeting, participants were welcomed by the principal, school counselor, SoF coordinator, and volunteer program director, each of whom helped overcome the parents' initial discomfort and lingering fear of the school by assuring them that they could be of real help to the teachers and staff. To show their commitment, school administrators designated one room for the volunteers to use as their own whenever they came to the school. This outreach worked well. It helped that the coordinator and volunteer program director had been co-directors of a local community service organization for many years and many parents knew and respected them.

At the monthly meetings that followed, the director guided and encouraged the participants. She listened to their questions—basic things such as how to behave in a school, how to dress, or "what if a teacher does something that makes you angry?"—and she recognized that extensive training was essential if these parents were to develop the self-confidence as well as the skills needed in order to be of help to the teachers. Training, then, which consisted primarily of participatory exercises on everything from grooming to parenting issues, became an integral part of this volunteer program.

It was also essential to explain the program to teachers and request their cooperation in finding work for the volunteers to do. In addition to written memos of explanation, the director offered an orientation program for the teachers, informing them of the types of assistance the parents could provide and, perhaps more important, asking the teachers for their patience. Parents at best are not necessarily welcomed in a school, and those who have had no experience working in a school setting often need extensive and patient guidance in carrying out classroom tasks.

Although the focus was on volunteering, the program also offered adult education, arranging for General Educational Development (GED) and English As A Second Language (ESL) classes at the school as well as workshops on

topics selected by the parents and relating to children and families. And it provided child care for preschoolers while the volunteers were working and snacks for group meetings and education sessions. For the parents who stayed with the program, the group in time evolved into the equivalent of a club and support group, using the room in the school as a place to meet and talk while cutting and coloring classroom projects throughout the day.

> The Hogg Foundation allowed each site to develop in its own way, in a way that made sense to them.
>
> — School District Liaison

The parent volunteer program is viewed as a success by school personnel and participants alike. The coordinator and volunteer director credit its success to the staff's frequent contact with parents, the ease of access to the school, education courses that meet parents' needs, and programs that are in line with parental interests. As a result of the program, they saw the parents increase their skills, improve their self-esteem, take better care of themselves, and participate in more activities with their children. For the first time, a number of the volunteers began to speak openly with the principal and the teachers. "Before, they either yelled at the teacher or did nothing," the coordinator noted. Another sign of success was when participants gained the ability and confidence to obtain paid employment. It seems ironic, however, that the participants who remained resented their former colleagues who became employed, not because they had jobs but because they no longer worked as parent volunteers.

Yet, despite the many volunteer hours contributed to the school—some 8,000 hours annually in the program's third through fifth year—only a small number of parents participated. Continuing recruitment by the director and word-of-mouth encouragement from enthusiastic participants netted small returns. From 40 to 50 mothers—and one or two fathers—signed up each year, but within a few months only a core group of about 20 remained, and these were the dedicated parents who gave the majority of volunteer hours to the school.[3]

What Worked—and What Didn't. The Parent Volunteer Program was the most structured parent involvement effort in the SoF, but each site encouraged parent

[3]For further information on this program, see *Parent Volunteer Program: San Antonio*. (1995). Austin: Hogg Foundation for Mental Health.

participation. Each also encountered similar barriers: phones were disconnected, families moved, parents worked long hours or feared coming to the school or felt incompetent, all making contact difficult and participation negligible.

Food and baby sitting proved the most effective enticements. To get around the fact that many parents have to be home feeding and caring for children in the evening, one site encouraged attendance at a health fair by arranging to have hot dogs and soft drinks available for only 25 cents each. With this enticement, parents could rush home from work, grab their youngsters, and come to the fair. At another site, a fast-food restaurant cooperated with the elementary school by hosting a family reading night, serving free french fries and soft drinks to all families who came and brought a book with them so the children and parents could read to one another.

Another time-honored way to bring parents to school is to showcase their children. The student mariachi band at one site was a big draw, as were talent shows, musical performances, and sports events. Other methods included family picnics with entertainment, raffles, brown-bag lunches with speakers, open houses to display student work, and special invitation-only events. These met with varying degrees of success, with programs in which students performed attracting the largest numbers of parents.

> I realized we'd reduced the barriers when parents who formerly never came to the school would ask, "Why aren't we having a meeting this week?"
>
> — Principal

Cultural awareness and understanding can make a difference in working with parents. In a support group for newly arrived Central American immigrants, for example, one coordinator found that if she "invited" the parents to each meeting, a large number would attend, but if she merely reminded them of the meeting, few would appear. The difference: an invitation was the culturally appropriate thing to do. Another coordinator thought parents would be pleased to be asked to serve on a community advisory committee. Instead, she learned that they were intimidated by the committee process and much preferred meeting informally. Making a course correction, she found that it was far more effective to visit the parents at home to solicit their ideas in a more familiar and comfortable setting.

The sites all sought ways to help the parents develop their own skills as well as involve them with their children. They offered GED and ESL classes, talk sessions, family strengthening programs, and workshops on topics ranging from "shopping smart" to how to talk to their children about sex. When it came to classroom participation, the sites found it important to assign tasks that were commensurate with the parents' abilities. "You don't ask persons with limited reading skills to read to the children," one coordinator pointed out. "You ask them to help in areas in which they are competent."

As difficult as it was to involve parents at the elementary level, it was even more difficult in the middle schools. This is not uncommon. Children at this stage seek greater independence, and their parents tend to encourage it or at least give their tacit approval. Although efforts were made, none of the sites was able to develop a strong parent involvement program beyond the elementary grades.

Our experience showed . . .

The barriers to parent involvement in low-income, high-minority areas are formidable. They cannot be overcome quickly or easily, and program planners should not expect them to be. The SoF experience at each site revealed a continuing struggle in which a great deal of time, effort, patience, and skill, along with an understanding of the culture of the target population, had to be expended to attract parent participation. It confirmed what other studies have shown: that providers must recognize parents' reluctance to involve themselves in the schools, they must make it easy for parents to enter the system, and they must have clear mechanisms for parents to become involved.[4] Furthermore, the effort must be a continuing one, even though it may impact only a small number of families. Not all parents have the time, energy, or inclination to volunteer or participate no matter what the incentives may be, and, beyond a basic level of attending school-sponsored events, not all teachers want them to.

[4]Dryfoos, J. (1994). *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers.

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PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Initiating Services

As the coordinators quickly realized, it was important early in the project to establish visible and effective services for students in order to build credibility and support for the SoF. Thus, even though the first year of the project had been earmarked as a time for planning, the sites devoted considerable time to bringing in and coordinating services designed to meet the most pressing needs of their respective neighborhoods.

The coordinators based their selection of services on several factors. The first consideration at each site was the community needs assessment, for this showed what the residents themselves considered most important for their children. Next was a review of ongoing programs at each site, because several social service programs already existed in each of the project's schools. It was up to the coordinators to decide how to coordinate both continuing and new services so that they would work well together in helping the students and their families. Also to be considered was which of the neighborhood agencies might be interested in locating on a school campus.

A majority of programs brought into the schools fit into one of the following categories:

- mental health - individual, group, and family counseling
- physical health - health screening, inoculations, health education
- early childhood - prenatal, infant, and early childhood education and care
- parent involvement - school volunteering, adult education, family events
- prevention - drug abuse, dropout, violence prevention programs
- problem solving - peer mediation, conflict resolution
- recreation - sports, scouting, after-school activities

It has been noted that expediency and visibility were important when the SoF began. Although some of the new programs became the keystones of the project, others served their purpose in the first year or two and were replaced or subsumed by later initiatives.

The SoF Experience

Differences in needs, existing and available services, and the skills and interests of the coordinators all had an impact on how the SoF developed at each site.

Site A was located in a relatively new residential area on the edge of town that, because of an economic downturn following its initial development, had never acquired the community organizations, recreational facilities, or commercial resources commonly available throughout the city. In fact, the site's elementary school and middle school were the only community buildings extant.

As a result, the coordinator's first task was to get some programs started in the schools to meet the community's expressed need for after-school care and recreational activities for their children. Some of the programs she attracted had tried to locate in these schools previously and were enthusiastic when she arranged for them to do so. A few, such as Girl Scouts, Boys Scouts, and DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), a program sponsored by the police department, had the advantage of being familiar with working on school campuses and were prepared to start quickly. Other small initiatives included a computer program offered by a children's museum, a parent support group, a teacher-staff support group, and a counseling group for victims of sexual abuse.

> The mediation program is one of the best programs on campus. Kids are learning that there are other ways than power to solve problems.
>
> — Teacher

To get each of these started, the coordinator's tasks included making initial and follow-up contacts with the various agencies, getting the approval of the principal or school district, arranging time schedules and space, planning for cleanup and security, handling publicity, and attracting potential participants. Among programs that already existed in the schools, some were too small to serve the students adequately. A mentoring program, for example, consisted of one volunteer. Working with a local government agency, the coordinator was able to interest more than 50 employees in serving as mentors for the school's young students.

Initially, the mentoring program and others at this site were not seen as SoF initiatives but as school efforts developed by the staff. This was in large part due to the coordinator, who wanted the school staff to feel that "we all worked together" in developing services. She thought this approach would help integrate the SoF into schools, enabling it to become part of the system structure rather than setting it apart.

The most far-reaching project the first year, and one recognized as an SoF event, was a community-wide health fair. Held on the grounds of the elementary school, with food and activities as well as free medical tests and handouts from representatives of health and service groups, it not only made the SoF known in the neighborhood but also was such a success that it became an annual event.

Site B focused more the first year on strengthening mental health services. The coordinator obtained funds to employ a second full-time counselor for the middle school. In addition, he worked with a local university to start an internship program in which students, under supervision, could provide counseling for students and their families. He also focused on families, informing them about available health agencies in the area and arranging for medical and social service agencies to introduce their personnel and services at a neighborhood open house. And he organized a meeting of parents, police, and area merchants to share information and work out ways to deal with the drug problem in the community.

Concomitant with initiating services, the coordinator worked on building partnerships with local businesses. He saw this as a way to obtain money for expanding the counseling program, for example, but beyond that he perceived it as a way to sell the SoF to the community and obtain not just one-time funding but long-term financial support.

> A variety of activities give kids a chance to feel a part of something.
> — Counselor

Site C, located across the street from a large public-housing project, was in an area that had a number of existing services, but, with extreme poverty and high unemployment, it especially needed ways to help strengthen families. To encourage the use of existing services, the coordinator visited local agencies, then compiled a directory of available programs. To make counseling accessible to local families, he arranged with two local universities to provide interns to the schools to work under his supervision. He also focused on parent involvement. Building on a small group of parents who helped out in the school, he developed a Parent Volunteer Program in which a number of parents came to school daily to help out in the classroom, the cafeteria, and the playground. To encourage parents to participate, he provided training not

only on how to work with teachers but also on topics the volunteers themselves selected, ranging from child development to how to interview for paid employment.

Site D, with a goal to provide one-stop shopping for families in need of services, spent the first year negotiating with agencies interested in moving into the former shopping mall and renovating space for them. The first to move in were Head Start, which had been looking for space in the demonstration site's part of town and was willing to cooperate with the elementary school's prekindergarten program, and a youth education and employment service. The former became an integral component of the project; the latter was asked to leave a few months after it began because of managerial and financial problems. Other contracts signed that first year focused on mental health. The local medical school, for example, provided a psychologist to train mental health problem-solving teams, and a family counseling agency provided internships for four school-district psychologists and visiting teachers to conduct family visitations and family systems counseling with students and their families.

Negotiating with service providers, working out the logistics of space and time schedules, and coordinating the programs so that they would work well together and serve the best interests of the target population took far more time than expected. As a result, the formal opening of the center, scheduled for the beginning of the second year, was delayed twice before it finally took place in the third year of the project.

Across sites, one common experience was that services were not introduced equally at schools within a given area. One school, generally at the elementary level, would become the focus of project efforts and the primary location for bringing in programs. In two sites these were schools where the coordinators were based. Despite this, one had the full support of the middle school principal, who believed that students who received needed help at the elementary level would be better prepared when they moved on to his school. The other principal had only minimal interest in the project so was not concerned that his school received less attention.

As programs were introduced, several problems also were common across sites. Each new service involved more time than anticipated from teachers, counselors, and principals in order to be fully integrated. Each increased the wear and tear on school facilities as well as raised concerns over liability, trans-

portation, and insurance. Often there was a need to renegotiate organizational structures and boundaries and to reassure teachers who were threatened by changes in lines of authority and frustrated by parents' apparent lack of involvement and concern.

Rather than clarify the purpose of the project, new programs brought into the SoF sometimes did the opposite, increasing the project's value but making its image more ambiguous. Families who used the programs were happy to have them, but many remained unaware of their connection to the SoF, if they knew of it at all.

Our experience showed . . .

Planning is essential, but services can't wait. A new school-based service project must balance planning with action, implementing a few programs quickly in order to develop project credibility and show that it offers more than mere promises. These first programs should meet a recognized need, be able to start quickly, and be experienced in or at least adaptable to working in a school system. Their visibility can help gain project support before major initiatives can get underway.

Building Partnerships

The word "partner" has taken on new meaning in the public schools. Time was when it was used primarily in the phrase, "choose your partner," directed at children in preparation for the next activity. Today it extends far beyond children, referring to those who contribute funding, in-kind support, and health and social services to broad-based and holistic projects located in schools and communities.

The SoF Experience

The following press release appeared in a major newspaper in early 1994:

> "There is a ray of hope for the future of students attending five Houston Heights area schools. The School of the Future, a project implemented and coordinated by the Family Service Center in collaboration with the Houston Independent School

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District, encourages partnerships among businesses, schools, parents, and social support services to enable students and their families to access resources necessary to improving their education and family living."

A SoF partner might be a service agency, civic organization, professional association, foundation, business, or even an individual who works with a school to benefit the students. Each site found different ways to attract partners. One offered free space, a powerful incentive for programs that traditionally are short on funds. The agencies administering these programs became partners in the project, their directors meeting monthly with the coordinator in order to coordinate their efforts. Two universities became partners at another site which lacked funds for professional counselors. Together they set up an internship program in which graduate students, under the coordinator's supervision, could provide individual and family counseling and therapy.

The Hogg Foundation itself might be considered the first partner. In the beginning it played a major role, providing funding and technical assistance and smoothing the way with authorities when the need arose. At the end of the five-year demonstration effort the Foundation relinquished its sponsorship but remained a partner, funding individual programs, reporting on the project evaluation, and, through association and name recognition, serving as an inducement to others for additional funding and support.

One partnership came about through an attorney who was a community resident. Disturbed that so many youths were "just standing around on street corners," he approached his church with a novel idea. He had served on the SoF board in that site and had spoken to the project coordinator about starting some type of program for these young people. Now he was enthusiastic about the possibility of starting a program that would provide a young and energetic social worker to initiate sports and other activities for neighborhood teenagers as well as provide an open door for youngsters who wanted counseling or just to talk. He asked the congregation for support.

The church had been interested for some time in doing something for youngsters who lived in the project site area, and they liked this idea. But more financial help was needed. Seeking additional funds, the attorney and his wife prepared a videotape of the SoF neighborhood, then visited churches of the same denomination throughout the city to stimulate interest in the proposed project and solicit their help. The year-long project, carried out in cooperation with the project coordinator, made the Roving Leader program possible.

Church support in this case extended beyond funding to a true feeling of partnership. Church members in distant parts of town took pride in reporting on what they considered "our program" and encouraged its expansion a year later by providing funds for a second Roving Leader.

Individuals in the community became invaluable partners in the project. A business woman helped develop partnerships with the business sector; a pediatrician opened the door to the city/county health department, leading in time to the development of a school health center to address student health needs; an agency administrator kept the coordinator apprised of requests for proposals and other potential funding sources.

And a local attorney, concerned that children tended to view fighting as the only way to settle disagreements, presented himself as a resource, offering to teach students about mediation. Working with the coordinator, who handled the logistics required, he led a peer mediation program in the middle school for a couple of years, then trained two staff members to continue the program.

> The SoF helped develop a greater sense of community and greater participation in the community by neighborhood residents.
>
> — Coordinator

Partnerships, once developed, must be nurtured. As one coordinator said, "It is an ordeal to keep resources that have been developed. Every time the budget comes up, you must stroke the board members and redo the application." Recognition for efforts made and work accomplished can help cement partnerships. One coordinator linked service organizations and volunteers with a program that mentions volunteers in its newsletters and gives awards at annual banquets. Another invited them to an annual luncheon to acknowledge their efforts.

The SoF helped encourage partnerships by serving as a resource for the community. With the support of the principals, the schools became available for meetings of neighborhood organizations, and SoF helped promote these events by distributing information about them through the schools. In turn, the community gradually began to feel an ownership in the programs, advocating for them by attending city and school board meetings to voice support for a proposed health center, for example, or to obtain city approval for turning an empty strip mall into a community recreation center.

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The sites also had to contend with partnerships that didn't measure up. When an after-school program at one site didn't follow through on promised activities despite SoF encouragement and offers of help, the coordinator felt obligated to end the partnership. "Kids need to be able to count on people," he pointed out.

Our experience showed . . .

Partnerships can enhance a project in a wide variety of ways, ranging from advocacy and funding to service provision and volunteer efforts. A project must be creative in attracting partners and resourceful in maintaining them.

Collaborating Services

Cooperation: A process of working together informally to achieve the day-to-day goals of the organization.

Coordination: A process of engaging in efforts that alter or smooth relationships of independent organizations, staffs, or resources.

Collaboration: A relationship in which agencies and organizations share common goals, mutual commitments, resources, decision making, and evaluation responsibilities.[5]

The three Cs play an important role in the delivery of human services. Traditionally, service groups have cooperated to some extent, providing information and referrals to one another but maintaining separate policies and procedures. Some have coordinated their activities in an effort to eliminate duplication and fill gaps in the system. Collaboration, however, is not traditional in this area and demands more of the agencies involved. To collaborate, groups must share their expertise. They should recognize that no one agency can "do it all" but must share ownership of problems and visions of goals, and, in many cases, share financial responsibility, as well.[6]

[5]Texas Children's Mental Health Plan Newsletter, February 1996.
[6]Ibid.

Cooperation. Working with agencies in a school setting involves more than obtaining agreements and space. It calls for different groups and different disciplines to recognize one another, serve together on advisory boards, and share information that will help serve the best interests of the children. People get along best if they understand one another. The SoF coordinators spent time orienting service providers to schools and their policies and helping school personnel as well as providers become more understanding of one another's work, constraints, and stresses. With understanding, groups can work together to achieve certain objectives while maintaining their independence and autonomy in carrying out tasks and duties.

Coordination. Every agency has its own policies and procedures, its own ways of doing what may be similar things. Having a variety of referral and application forms, for example, can become cumbersome when groups are working toward a holistic system of service delivery. After several agencies were on board, coordinators found it useful to look over all of the application forms, then condense them into one form that could be used with all SoF services brought into that site. This simplified procedure saved considerable time for both school and agency staff.

Collaboration. Whether at the top level—the supporting foundation, for example, or the school district—that opens doors, or at the community level, where the action is, collaboration involves putting one's own turf aside in the interest of the group. It requires a fourth C, communication. Any cooperative, coordinated, or collaborative effort demands open communication among all the players, keeping everyone informed so that each group feels included and none of the participants feels offended or left out. This is no easy task, but, especially when needs are great and money is scarce, it should be considered an essential one. Each of the SoF sites demonstrated that it could be done, and done well, resulting in better services for more students than otherwise would have been possible. The following samples describe, in brief, some of the collaborative efforts that took place.

• Head Start had been trying for several years to open a program in this SoF community but had been deterred by lack of space. On the rare occasions when potential space had become available, it had failed to meet the federal program's stringent facility requirements. Rather than continue the search for space, the SoF coordinator took a broader approach. She brought together representatives of the local Head Start agency, city government, neighbor-

hood parents, and the project's schools to explore the possibilities together for starting a full-day Head Start program.

After a number of meetings and discussions, a true collaborative effort emerged. The middle school principal offered space for the program on his campus, a first for the city and a contrast to the customary elementary school or independent locations. The school district agreed to this and provided two portable buildings in which to house the program, the city paid for the buildings, and the agency assumed responsibility for implementing and managing the program. The result was a Head Start program for 60 to 80 youngsters in a hitherto unserved part of the city.

Collaboration efforts did not stop here. Working with the school district and principal, the project coordinator helped the agency establish two half-day programs, enabling youngsters enrolled in the elementary school's morning and afternoon prekindergarten programs to complete the other half of their days in Head Start. In this way children could continue in prekindergarten for the academic program, receive full-day care in one location, and obtain the health and social services provided by Head Start. The Head Start agency, in turn, provided teaching assistants for the prekindergarten classes to improve their child-teacher ratios. Since the middle school was across the street from the elementary school, the location not only was a convenient one but also offered parents of young children a positive view of the school. And Parents As Teachers, a parent education service linked to the SoF to serve children from birth to age 3 and their families, helped with recruitment for Head Start as well as offered workshops for the parents of children who were enrolled.

• A principal and a couple of his teachers, informally discussing ways to ease the entry to middle school for newly graduated fifth graders, decided to try a new idea: to collaborate with staff at each of the feeder elementary schools to create a special summer transition program for these students and their parents. Key players were:

- the principal and staff of the middle school, who opened their campus for the week-long session
- the principals of the SoF's two elementary schools as well as the other three schools whose graduates would attend the middle school, to get their cooperation and support
- teachers from each of the participating schools, to augment the teaching staff

- the school district liaison, who obtained approval from the district to conduct the program and to provide school buses to bring participants to the school
- community members, to provide lunch each day for the participants
- a major oil company, to contribute funds to cover the costs involved, which included gym uniforms and combination locks for the students

The group also collaborated in planning the program. For the students, the week featured a tour of the school, a facsimile of changing classes, and workshops on how to study and what to expect in the coming year. For the parents, information focused on student services and programs, teacher expectations, and tips on such topics as communicating with children and how to develop good study habits.

The coordinator's role was to coordinate all of the plans, people, and activities, which included handling the logistics, helping with publicity to encourage student and family participation, and conducting workshops during the program itself. The program was so successful that it was expanded to six weeks the following summer and has served as a model for other schools in the district.

• Starting a health clinic on a middle school campus involved more than medical personnel; it called for the cooperation and support of the school, the school district, the parents, and the community at large. Key players for this project included:

- the middle school principal, who recognized that "if children are hungry and hurting, they won't want to learn"
- a local private-nonprofit agency that had been providing low-cost, high-quality health care services to low-income families in the area for more than 20 years
- the school district liaison to the SoF
- community members
- the SoF coordinator, who made necessary arrangements and contacts and kept everyone informed

The school district liaison was the catalyst. Knowing that a health clinic fit into the SoF design, she informed the project coordinator and the middle school principal of the new request-for-proposals issued by the nonprofit agency and urged them to submit a proposal. Responding quickly, the principal first sought community support and approval. He spoke to the neighborhood association,

churches, parents groups, and individuals, explaining in down-to-earth terms how this type of service not only would improve student health but also would improve students' potential for learning. The agency director, in turn, spoke to the principals whose schools had submitted proposals to determine if these key administrators would provide essential support. The SoF coordinator, meanwhile, kept the various groups and players informed, made sure deadlines were met and paperwork completed, and coordinated the many different elements involved.

Constructing the clinic involved further collaboration. The school district provided the space. When the original space was rejected due to cost and installation problems, the district and city had to work together closely to insure meeting construction and safety codes. Funds for fitting out the clinic were promised by the family service center that managed the SoF at that site. When the time came to deliver, however, the center had lost a major funding source and was obligated to conduct a funding campaign, enhanced by the cooperation and help of the neighborhood association and the SoF coordinator, in order to make good on its promise. The health care management agency handled equipment, supplies, and staff. This ongoing responsibility meant working within the school system, following the rules and regulations of the district, and working harmoniously with faculty and staff in an education setting. Without the strong motivation and collaboration of the key players, it seems unlikely that the health clinic would have gotten off the ground.

Our experience showed . . .

As human services move from an individual to a holistic orientation, collaboration becomes increasingly important. It is time consuming. It involves learning the jargon of the various collaborators and "translating" it into language everyone involved can understand, recognizing the constraints under which persons perform in other agencies and professions, and keeping lines of communication open. It calls for "sitting and talking together, struggling through it, compromising." It means working with funders and volunteers to encourage them and keep them motivated, because results won't be seen quickly. It requires keeping focused on the goals, putting turfism aside in the interests of the total program or service. The bottom line is that in the long run, it means improved services for the target population.

Promoting the Project

Good public relations are essential in the development of a school-based services project. Close to home the project must be promoted to gain the support of such key players as school and service agency personnel, parents, and community leaders. Beyond that, it must reach out to business and industry leaders to entice them into becoming funding partners, and to the larger community or city so people can see the schools and their new initiative in a good light.

> Newspapers, television, and proposals for funding generally paint a bleak picture of today's children at risk and their families. We want to show people the positive elements; we want them to know about the good things we are doing, how we are helping these kids so they can lead better lives.
>
> — Coordinator

But some publicity is not positive, especially when it is beyond the project's control. When adverse publicity appears, whether it reaches citywide through the media or is limited to the neighborhood through word of mouth, it is the responsibility of the coordinator to find ways to counteract or ameliorate it.

The SoF Experience

The project coordinators carried out a number of similar public relations activities. These included attending meetings, giving talks to civic and professional groups, responding to requests for information about the project, and taking visitors on tours of their sites. As the project became better known, the coordinators spent an increasing amount of time hosting school board members, educators, and state agency personnel from around the state and country who were interested in seeing school-based services in action.

They differed, however, in their philosophy and approaches to promoting the project actively beyond the immediate community. One, for example, frequently responded to requests to speak to civic groups and at schools throughout the city as well as on local television and radio programs, and he developed a SoF videotape to enhance these presentations. Viewing project-relat-

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ed events as media opportunities, he arranged an open house when the school health clinic opened, attracting five of the local media along with school board members, SoF personnel, and members of the community. His school district had a large media department that had to approve information released about the schools. The coordinator found the department helpful and supportive. "You can buck the system and do it your way," he said, "and not get media coverage, or you can work within the system and get good publicity." He found it expedient to work within the system and to deal with reporters "logically, sensitively, and professionally."

In contrast, two of the sites delayed seeking media coverage, considering it best to wait until services were well-established. One postponed a planned open house twice due to delays in building renovations and setting up programs. The coordinator chose not to introduce the SoF to the community nor publicize individual services until all services in the building were in place. Her concern was that if the project were introduced before that time, it would be viewed as a center for a specific program such as MHMR, for example, or family counseling rather than as the comprehensive service center it was designed to be.

> I spend a lot of time on public relations. Some is in-house, encouraging and motivating teachers. Some is off-site, seeking community support by attending meetings, speaking to civic and professional groups, showing visitors around the site, and responding to all the requests for information.
>
> — Coordinator

The coordinator at the other site shied away from publicity. When, in the project's third year, he invited the press to attend an informal unveiling of a mural the children had painted, the timing conflicted unexpectedly with a happening in another part of the city, and only a reporter from a local Spanish-language station attended the school function. The result was coverage that local residents could see and appreciate but that failed to extend beyond the neighborhood.

Negative publicity can flare up unexpectedly about any project. It occurred only twice at SoF sites, both times in regard to whether adequate parental permission was obtained for testing children in the project's evaluation. In each case, the Foundation president stepped in to rectify the situation, and the

coordinators agreed to speak to every parent to assure that they had permission for testing.

Our experience showed . . .

Project promotion must take place on a continuing basis in the schools to assure support, in the local community to attract clients and maintain good will, and in the broader community to reach potential partners and providers. Promoting the project—and countering negative publicity—are among the many and varied ongoing tasks of the coordinator.

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DETERMINING THE RESULTS

Social service programs for children have proliferated over the past 30 years. Many have been viewed as successful by the providers, many by the clients. Few, however, have been able to substantiate their project's success by documenting the process of implementation, evaluating the outcomes, or assessing whether the project met its goals.

Well aware of this lack of documentation, the Hogg Foundation from the beginning of the SoF not only provided $1 million to fund the five-year demonstration project but also pledged an equal amount to conduct a two-fold evaluation: quantitative, using measurable outcomes to verify the impact of the project on the students, their families, and the schools; and qualitative, to describe and assess the process of project development. Also from the beginning, each site had to express a willingness to participate in the project evaluation before it could be accepted as a demonstration site.

> People may not know the SoF by name, but they know what's in the school. They see it as an active place, there's so much going on.
>
> — Program Director

Why bother conducting an evaluation when it is complicated, time consuming, and the money spent might be used for providing more services? Indeed, for some social service agencies, the major reason for including an evaluation is that many funders require that one be included in proposals submitted to them for funding.

But evaluations can prove useful in other, perhaps more important, ways. Documenting a need for services and providing solid evidence on successful results can be used to convince policymakers of the need for legislation and appropriations. The fact that the SoF evaluation was included from the beginning of the project gave credibility to the effort and proved to be an incentive for agencies and organizations to participate in the project.

Another benefit is providing feedback. A major use of the SoF evaluation was to give feedback to the schools on the students and their families, information that might only be guessed at by the teachers but not confirmed. Feedback not only gave teachers and administrators information that they could use in improving the education program but also motivated them by enabling them to feel that they were a part of the project and essential to its success.

Beyond that, evaluation can reaffirm the principles that provide the basis for an initiative and that can be applied to any future project.

QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION

The evaluation design, developed by Hogg Foundation staff with input from an advisory committee, called for pre- and post-testing of students in the project's demonstration schools (the experimental group) and students in demographically similar schools not participating in the SoF (the control group). This design was selected to allow for a comparison of project outcomes across the sites as well as within each site. A full-time evaluation director was employed by the Foundation to supervise the evaluation, assisted by five half-time graduate students, one assigned to each of the four sites and one to manage the computerized data bank. Test instruments were selected on the basis of national validity, applicability to the target population, and sampling ease.

> HF was honest in reporting on data; acknowledged when it was inconclusive or didn't show what they'd hoped it would.
>
> — Advisory Board Member

The broad purpose of the evaluation was to determine the outcomes, that is, the effectiveness and impact of the project on the students and their schools and the relationship of project costs to benefits gained. More specific objectives included stabilizing families, reducing school dropouts, improving physical and mental health, and empowering community members to take a more active role in the lives of their children and themselves.

What follows is not a summary of the SoF quantitative evaluation. (That will be available from the Hogg Foundation in another publication in 1997.) Rather, it is a review of some of the evaluation problems and issues that arose during the course of the project, how these were met by evaluation staff, and

what we learned from these experiences that might be useful for others contemplating or conducting evaluations in the field.

The SoF Experience

Designing the evaluation

Planning the goals, methodology, and implementation of an evaluation depends on many factors, ranging from complexity and comprehensiveness of a project to funding and technical ability. Nonetheless, some elements of the SoF evaluation have broad applicability.

First, it is important to clearly identify the goals, keeping them focused on the purpose of the project and what positive outcomes might result. Next, select or develop measures that fit the goals.

In the SoF, the primary intervention was systemic: introducing a project coordinator to obtain and coordinate health and social services on a school campus. The Foundation also was concerned with the impact of the project on the climate, or environment, of the demonstration schools and on the students and families who participated in the services. The evaluation, therefore, needed to focus first on the manner and extent to which these services were brought to the campus, and then on the effectiveness of the services in bringing about the desired improvements. Standardized survey instruments were selected to measure changes in school climate, student self-esteem, and other indicators of student and teacher perceptions. Other, less quantifiable, means had to be used to assess the impact of the project coordinator in bringing together social services and the overall impact of the project.

At one site, for example, where family mobility led to a student attrition rate of 50 percent, the project attained one goal: improving community stability. This did not have an immediate impact on student achievement or mental health, but it enabled families to remain in the school district long enough for students at least to participate in the interventions that were designed to have an impact on academic achievement. In addition to finding appropriate measures of family stability—for example, each year determining the number and percentage of students who remained in the same school throughout the academic year—a qualitative family survey was conducted to determine how this came about.

Conducting the Evaluation

Some forms of data collection take place daily in schools, offices, and classrooms, among them records of attendance and tardiness, homework completed, and classroom assignments. Other data are collected periodically on intelligence tests and achievement tests mandated by the state education agency. However, information expected to be readily available sometimes was not available at all; some, though available, was not reliable. To obtain the information you want and to get it accurately, it is best to obtain it yourself. Conducting surveys in the classrooms was another matter. Although surveys were conducted only once a year and took less than one hour per classroom, they called for the teachers' cooperation and took time from the academic agenda.

For the coordinators, these assessments involved informing the teachers each year about the purpose of the evaluation, handling the logistics of administering the surveys, making sure that the proper forms were available for different students, and helping the evaluation staff as needed. This extra work on the part of coordinators kept the evaluation from being too intrusive. Most of the school personnel accepted the evaluation as "something I just have to do." Incentives also helped. Teachers commented that they appreciated small monetary awards for purchasing things for their classes that they wouldn't otherwise be able to get; children were happy to receive candy bars for returning completed and signed consent forms whether or not their parents allowed them to participate in the surveys.

A number of Key Informant Survey respondents favored the evaluation, pointing out that it gave the project credibility. Several thought it made the project seem important, that it helped them feel more like partners in the effort. They were more favorable when they were included in evaluation plans and guided in what they might realistically expect the project to accomplish.

Administrators and teachers alike looked forward to reports on the findings, both to reflect good things about their school as well as give them useful information for improving school practices. They made it clear that they didn't want complicated statistics; they wanted feedback in a form they could understand. Respondents pointed out another value of the evaluation: the research associates who conducted the surveys made frequent site visits to collect information and provide technical assistance, as well, giving them an opportunity to observe the project in action and obtain information and impressions beyond the data gathered from the formal evaluation.

Interpreting the Results

Conducting an evaluation in the field means facing some realities—of school systems, the target population, and communities. Initially, the evaluation team had to recognize and face these realities, some anticipated, some not. There was, for example, the reality of student mobility, a common problem in low-income neighborhoods. This meant that a large subject sample might be reduced by half in as little as one year's time and considerably more over the course of a five-year project. At one SoF site, for example, although about 80 percent of the middle-school students completed the annual survey each year, only about 15 percent could be followed from one grade to the next for all three years of middle school. A majority of those who could not be followed had transferred or dropped out in the interim; a small percent were missed because they were absent on the day of the survey or their parents had withdrawn consent. If this reality is recognized, sample size won't be overestimated but can be projected realistically.

Another reality concerned cause and effect; the difficulty, in other words, of determining whether outcomes were the direct result of the project or of different variables such as other interventions that were being carried out in each of the schools or an upturn in the economy. The problems addressed by the SoF were complex, as were the remediations. Thus, when desired outcomes were achieved—or when they were not—it was difficult to verify whether these outcomes resulted primarily or even secondarily from a specific intervention.

One problem, though anticipated from the start, proved to be far more difficult and time consuming than expected. That was obtaining parental consent for testing children. Two methods for obtaining informed consent were used at different times and different sites during the course of the project: active consent, in which parents were asked to sign and return a consent form if they agreed to let their children receive services or participate in project evaluation, and passive consent, in which parents were asked to sign and return a form only if they did not want their children to participate. The latter was the easiest method and, because it required no action, led to the greatest number of participants.

However, a problem was encountered almost from the beginning. Not all parents received the forms, some did not understand them despite efforts to include forms in Spanish as well as English, and some did not see the purpose for the evalution and were leery of having their children "tested." Although the entire procedure was in full compliance with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations, there was an accusation reported by

the media that the project at one site was testing children without parental consent. Such misunderstandings are likely to occur. It is important to be fully aware of federal and state regulations and to comply with them whenever human subjects are involved. Even when regulations are followed, misunderstandings may occur, as was the case with the SoF. Clarification by the Hogg Foundation, along with a switch from passive to active consent, was needed at the specified site in order to continue the evaluation and not lose community support.

Another problem concerned the use of comparison schools. Traditionally in academic evaluations, the sample group that receives an intervention is compared to a similar group that does not receive one. In this case, schools in each community that were the same size and served students of similar ethnic and socioeconomic status as the demonstration schools were selected to serve as comparisons. But schools in a community cannot be isolated as can subjects in a laboratory. Investigators soon realized that virtually all schools in low-income areas receive a variety of special services, and though they may not be school based, these services impact the students to some degree. Furthermore, it is difficult for busy principals and teachers, even when incentives are offered, to agree to testing in their schools when neither the school nor the students receive any of the services offered at the demonstration sites. As a result, although data were obtained from some comparison schools for the first two or three years of the project, difficulties in controlling variables and maintaining administrative cooperation led the Foundation to discontinue the effort to compare SoF with non-SoF schools.

Unanticipated problems can influence the way in which an evaluation is conducted as well as its results. Although the four demonstration sites each agreed to participate in the project evaluation, one site, on reflection, determined that one of the student surveys to be administered was not in keeping with the school district's philosophy. After voicing their concern, and unable to come to an agreement with the Foundation, they withdrew from the quantitative evaluation. They had no objection to being included in the qualitative evaluation and continued as an SoF site. As a result, however, project outcomes that are based on student and teacher reports and self-esteem and school climate surveys can be reported on three rather than four pilot sites.

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Outcomes and consequences

It is tempting, when starting a new social service program, to paint a glowing picture of the benefits that might result. Tempting as it may be, it is important not to make a project a panacea for the ills of the community. In other words, have realistic expectations. Don't oversell the project; don't try to achieve too much.

Outcome measures should address what a program can change. Change takes time. Often the results of an intervention, especially one focused on young children, do not become apparent until a number of years later. And often the uncontrolled variables—the things beyond a program's control such as student and teacher mobility, economic improvements or downturns, family problems, and the like—obscure the link between actions and outcomes.

Success can lead to unexpected consequences. One to be aware of is that the situation may get worse before it gets better. When, for example, the youngsters most at risk of dropping out remain in school because of a successful retention program, it can be a mixed blessing for the administrators. On the one hand, an increase in school retention attests to the project's success; on the other hand, it is likely to result in lower test scores school wide, at least in the short run, as children with the lowest academic standing stay in school. Thus, what appears to be lower school-wide test scores may actually be reflecting retention-rate success.

Another consequence of success might be an increase in perceived mental health problems. This occurs when teachers, who previously may have denied or worked around students' problems because they had no place to refer children for help, become more willing to recognize problems and refer children for counseling or therapy when such help becomes available.

Another potential unanticipated result involves funding. Often, initial funding is viewed as seed money, given to help a project get off the ground. When a project becomes successful, the original funding source may consider that its initial money has accomplished its purpose and that future funds could be put to better use helping another new program get started. Although most funding sources are up-front about the need for new programs to expand their sources of funding and become self-sufficient, some programs retain the hope that their success will result in continued funding and fail to seek or obtain other support.

On the other hand, some unanticipated results are positive. The SoF found that when surveys were conducted in the neighborhoods, as was the case with needs assessments at each site, they increased community awareness and, in turn, acceptance of the project. They became a type of marketing tool to reach parents and encourage their participation.

Our experience showed . . .

We had a lot to learn about evaluating school-based services, but we were not alone. As noted in The Evaluation Exchange, since most school-based service projects have been developed only in the past decade, there is little information available about how they function or how they affect the children they serve. "As a result," the newsletter points out, "evaluators have had little time to document changes in the service delivery patterns themselves, and even less time to document outcomes related to these changes."[7]

Some things we learned in time to make mid-course corrections, others we recognized after the fact. Among those that seem useful and applicable on a broad scale are the following:

- Decide what you want to measure and how you are going to measure it. Keep the measurements focused on what the project is designed to accomplish.
- Bring the key players in on the evaluation by asking them what they expect or would like to learn from the project, and help them avoid unrealistic expectations.
- Explain the purpose of the evaluation to the parents, especially in terms of how it will help their youngsters.
- Don't rely on the availability of information or the cooperation of participating schools.
- Use the evaluation to provide periodic feedback to principals and teachers that might be useful to them in their work.
- Recognize that you cannot conduct a laboratory study in the field because you cannot control the variables.
- Don't let the evaluation become too intrusive or make too many demands on school staff.
- Review your evaluation methodology and results periodically. Use the information learned for any necessary mid-course corrections.
- Be aware of demographic changes at the site and policy or philosophic

[7] *The Evaluation Exchange: Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child and Family Services*. Harvard Family Research Project, Vol. 1, No. 2, Spring 1995.

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QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

The quantitative evaluation was designed to show the outcomes of SoF, that is, what did the project accomplish and how successful was it in meeting its goals and objectives. But although numbers can validate the results of a project, they cannot tell the whole story. How were these goals accomplished? What enabled the project to be more successful in certain areas than in others? How did the participants, providers and clients alike, perceive the SoF?

Questions such as these formed the basis of the qualitative, or process, evaluation of the School of the Future Project. The focus was on the process of development and implementation, which offers essential information for improving a project or replicating it in comparable sites. This can be captured through the perspectives of key players which, when taken together, reflect what worked and what didn't work in coordinating social services on a school campus.

The SoF Experience

A major point that became increasingly obvious over the course of the project was the need for a strong qualitative evaluation. When the SoF began, the emphasis was on quantitative evaluation. The qualitative component consisted of employing consultants to document the project's start-up phase by interviewing project coordinators, school principals, and school district administrators and liaisons throughout the first two years. As the project progressed, however, the Foundation recognized that process and implementation data were essential for validating the effectiveness of the SoF.

Early in the project's third year, the Foundation, with the advice of a special evaluation review panel, expanded its qualitative component. Although further interviews were not in the original evaluation plan, they were added at this point. A senior researcher with the Foundation was appointed to conduct extensive interviews on broad, predetermined topics with project coordinators and other key personnel every few months throughout the duration of the project and to make site visits to observe the project in action.

In the project's fourth year the qualitative component was expanded again, this time at the recommendation of an evaluation review panel that had been appointed to review the status and comprehensiveness of the overall evaluation. Two components were added: a Family Survey, to be conducted

with families living in the neighborhoods of each of the SoF sites to determine parents' perspectives of their children's schools, community, and SoF services; and a second Key Informant Survey, this to be conducted in the fifth and final year of the project.

Our experience showed . . .

For a project such as the SoF that focuses on systemic change—coordinating health and social services in an educational setting—a qualitative, or process, evaluation is invaluable and should be incorporated into the overall evaluation design. It is essential for learning how the project turned out, what it requires in time, resources, political connections, and up-front commitments to implement and operate it, and how to recognize and avoid potential problems. It also provides a blueprint for others who are interested in replicating or adapting such an effort.

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LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

From the seed of an idea to a fully developed school-based services project, the School of the Future provided a valuable learning experience for the Hogg Foundation. The sections in this book that begin with "Our experience showed . . ." explain, in brief, some of the key things we learned regarding specific tasks and issues in initiating and carrying out the project. From interviews and observations we also gained an overall picture of the project—its strengths and weaknesses, the challenges and realities it faced, and its potential for other schools and other neighborhoods. Some of what we experienced confirms what others have already learned; some, however, might provide insight to educators and service providers who are seeking, planning—or thrust into—a collaborative school-based services project.

PROJECT STRENGTHS

Some of the SoF strengths anticipated by the funding organization were borne out by the project. At the end of five years, the overall framework appeared to be adaptable, responsive to various ethnic groups, resilient in the face of changing neighborhoods and key players, and flexible enough to fit the needs of different communities.

Key players at each of the sites expressed project strengths in light of how the process worked and what outcomes they saw as a result. The major results they perceived were the many and diverse services brought onto the campuses and the development of parent involvement.

The implementation of a variety of social services was the strength mentioned most often by survey respondents. Although they realized they would have had some services without the SoF—in fact, all of the schools had a few social services before the project began—the key players thought that they had gained far more than they would have without the project. They thought the services obtained were more diverse and more accessible than

they would have been without the coordinators' efforts, and they liked the family-oriented, holistic approach that focused on the whole child instead of addressing individual problems.

> Regaining and maintaining involvement of school personnel: We've been successful, but it hasn't come easily.
>
> — Service Center Director

Parent development also was viewed as a major strength. Respondents credited the project with making it easier for parents to be involved in their children's schooling as well as helping teachers become more accepting of parents coming to school. Teachers not only saw parents more often but also saw them act more at ease in a school setting and deal more cooperatively with behavior problems. In turn, parents who volunteered in the school found that the teachers were friendlier and more communicative. As one teacher noted, "It used to be 'us' and 'them.' Now more often it's 'we'." Respondents also credited the SoF with improving parent and community relationships with the school. As the schools became more open and accessible, parents began turning to them for help and as a community resource. Through the efforts of the project coordinators and principals, some of the schools are now serving the role of community centers and "safe havens" in their neighborhoods.

Key to the SoF, according to educators, providers, and participants, was having a strong coordinator. Each site considered its coordinator ideal. Listed among the coordinators' outstanding qualities were the ability to gain respect and trust, motivate people and get them involved, deal with problems quickly and openly, get things done, and serve as a resource for information and contacts.

Other strengths focused on the project's philosophy and process of development. These included the project's flexibility, permitting autonomous development at each site; the encouragement of collaboration as a means of more effective problem solving and better services; and the holistic, family-oriented focus. The Foundation's five-year funding was seen as a show of commitment and its reputation as a major source of clout and credibility that was influential in getting the project started as well as providing leverage for obtaining additional funding.

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FACING REALITIES

The key players surveyed focused far more on project strengths than weaknesses. Often they replied "none" or "don't know of any" when asked to state the project's weak areas, and when pressed, they referred to barriers and challenges rather than weaknesses inherent in the project. Some of the barriers faced by the SoF were realities that were beyond the project's control; others could be viewed as challenges, calling attention to the need for different approaches or renewed effort.

> A five-year commitment at the front-end was good; it enabled us to build the program without having to worry about funding, at least for a while.
>
> — Service Center Director

The realities faced by the SoF evaluation team follow. The important thing is to recognize and acknowledge these and any other realities at a given site or project and be prepared to face them when instituting a school-based services project.

• Changing demographics

The planners and implementers of the SoF had no illusions about the population served—primarily children and families in low-income, high-minority areas—but they were surprised, nonetheless, to find that children and their families were even worse off and their problems more overwhelming than anyone could have predicted. A disproportionately high percentage of children at one site, for example, had developmental delays, often quite severe. Another site saw an increasing number of sex abuse cases, depression, and issues related to having a parent in prison. Younger and younger children evidenced mental health problems.

In part this was because the focus of the project was on children at greatest risk. In part, however, it was due to changing demographics. At one site, as a result of the influx of families from Central America—families that were non-English-speaking and had little education, few job skills, and even lower incomes than their predecessors—the Hispanic population rose, over a ten-year period, from 38 percent to 52 percent. One result: in one school when the project began, there were five children in kindergarten who spoke no English; five years later the school had two full classes of non-English-speaking kindergarteners. The economic downturn was evidenced when the

school, which initially didn't qualify for Chapter 1 funds, became eligible for that federal funding.

• Student and family mobility

Another challenge was student and family mobility. One elementary school noted a 30 percent turnover among students in a given year. In the middle schools, which generally consist of grades 6, 7 and 8, students attend for only three years, at best, and many transfer out and return more than once in that time period. This lack of academic continuity means that programs lose many youngsters and their families with whom they start working. As one counselor said—and she spoke for other service providers as well as teachers—"We invest in kids, then the kids are gone. It's hard on the staff as well as the students."

• Teacher and staff turnover

Mobility is high among staff at most of the demonstration schools. Over the project's first five years, turnover of principals was high—three schools had three principals, six had two; only two schools kept the same principal over the course of the project. Particularly at one site, principals who moved took teachers with them, resulting in a teacher turnover rate as high as 50 percent in a given year.

When school personnel were transferred or moved during the course of the project, it meant that someone who had been oriented to the SoF and possibly had become an advocate was no longer available to fill that role. Because faculty support is crucial for school-based services, the coordinators had to explain the project time and time again to help newcomers develop an awareness and acceptance of the SoF as well as renew the interest and motivation of those already familiar with it.

It should be noted that staff mobility can have a positive as well as a negative impact. At one site, the turning point came when a middle-school principal who was lukewarm about health and social services in a school setting was replaced by a strong advocate for school-based services. On the other hand, the replacement of a highly supportive elementary-school principal by a succession of administrators with other priorities diminished the project's effectiveness at one elementary school.

• Evaluation-team turnover

Just as teachers and other school staff change over time, so do members of evaluation teams. Especially in a long-term project, funders must expect evaluators to relocate, accept new positions, or graduate and move on. It is wise

to be prepared for such changes and train replacement personnel to move into vacated positions so that technical assistance and evaluation at the sites can continue smoothly.

• Attitudes toward mental health
The term "mental health" elicits different attitudes and interpretations. The primary concerns of the parents surveyed were survival, safety, and meaningful activities for their children. Mental health was a low priority, if it was considered at all.

Among school district personnel, opinions differed. One site thought mental health implied pathology and feared that mental health programs might stigmatize the students. In contrast, a site with a counseling program on campus for several years prior to the SoF had had time to overcome misperceptions and to enable families to realize the potential value of counseling. Yet another site avoided the issue by playing down the mental health approach and presenting the SoF as a dropout prevention program. Using a broad interpretation of the term, the coordinator brought in activities ranging from recreation to public safety under the rubric of mental health.

MEETING CHALLENGES

Just as a cup can be viewed as half full or half empty, a problem can be viewed as an obstruction or a challenge. It is with the latter perspective—a willingness to meet a challenge or overcome a barrier—that a project director has the greatest chance for success. SoF coordinators worked hard to meet the following challenges.

• Getting parent participation
This was seen as the biggest challenge. Among the barriers were parents' fear of school related to their own experiences as students, poor English-language skills, different cultural backgrounds, and the feeling that the only time they were asked to come to school was when a child was in trouble.

• Effective utilization of the middle school
Respondents agreed that this had much to do with the developmental stage of middle-school students. Parent involvement at this level also was more difficult to obtain.

• Promoting change

It is easier to give lip service to change than to practice it. Challenges that must be faced in a coordinated or collaborative initiative include turfism, politics, and all the different rules and regulations, jargon, timelines, and priorities that exist in agencies accustomed to working independently rather than together on behalf of a given population. Changing traditional methods and practices depends as much on a willingness to do so as it does on understanding and carrying out the necessary tasks.

> Five years ago we literally begged parents to come in, we held them by the hand. Now parents come to the principal with requests or to express views. They say, "we know something is happening, we'll talk to your superintendent; we have a say—listen to us." They wouldn't have done it before; now they're empowered.
>
> — Principal

In large bureaucracies, action takes place slowly. As one coordinator noted, "When two large bureaucracies such as an independent school district and a department of human services work together, you have several layers of decision making and approval to go through before any action can be taken." A school administrator summed it up: "A bureaucracy doesn't let people be as flexible as they'd like."

Working with parents to bring about change can be a slow and sometimes discouraging process, just as it is to try to bring about change in large systems. Patience is needed to develop trust, especially among people who are used to seeing trust broken. It is more productive to focus on changes that take place, however small—seeing parents come to a basketball game, for example, or fewer children referred to the principal for misbehavior—than it is to look for major changes that may not be measurable or obvious for many years.

• Setting achievable goals and expectations

When starting a service intervention, it is unwise to promise—or expect—too much. Set realistic goals, with objectives that potentially can be met. No single initiative or intervention, no matter how promising, is a cure-all; you can only hope that it will meet the specific goals that have been set.

• Keeping focused and patient

One cannot change these realities. One can, however, learn to cope with them and to handle the real-life issues that keep cropping up no matter how much planning you have done or how skilled you and your colleagues might be. This calls for:

- dealing with frustrations
- keeping colleagues, clients, and collaborators with you
- continuing to build the program while simultaneously seeking more funding
- focusing on survival skills—your own as well as the project's
- knowing when, where, and how to get technical assistance
- dealing with political changes and changing players
- anticipating problems and changes

There are no pat answers or solutions to dealing with these challenges. The important thing is to be aware of potential challenges and problems so you can be better prepared to handle them when they arise.

MOVING AHEAD

When the initial SoF funding ended after five years, all of the players at each of the sites worked to make sure that the project would continue. Ultimately, rather than seek ways to continue the project, the sites sought ways to maintain the coordinator, for they recognized that the coordinator was the key to the project and that without that person, there would be no SoF as it had been developed.

As they had with other processes, each site used a different approach. One incorporated school-based services into the school system, subsuming the School of the Future into the school district's Youth and Family Service Program. This site had been planning to do this for several years, and it used the SoF as a model for program development in other schools throughout the district.

Another school district expanded the program by starting it in a cluster of schools in a different part of town. The district changed the management somewhat, placing a coordinator at each of the new schools and giving the original coordinator a management role for both the old and new sites. Yet another site added the coordinator's salary to the budget of the ISD assistant superintendent for the area in which the project was located. One, unable to get district support, restructured the position so that the schools involved could

arrange to use Chapter I funds to employ the coordinator in a role in which she could continue to carry out the project.

Attesting to the project's acceptance and success is the fact that it is being continued at each site for the second year beyond the initial five-year grant made by the Foundation. These various ways of project continuation exemplify the project's flexibility. Beyond that, the SoF demonstrates the importance of getting to know the community, of understanding its issues and problems, and of recognizing the potential contributions of community residents in overcoming these problems. The project was set up to address some of the problems of education that extend beyond the classroom. Its contribution to the field of education is that is has demonstrated some ways in which these problems can be dealt with more effectively.

No doubt the SoF will continue to evolve as it develops to meet the changing needs of its schools and communities. The name itself may change or be dropped, as it has at one site, when the idea of school-based services is incorporated into a school system. The important thing is that for educators, policy makers, service providers, and potential funders, the SoF exemplifies one approach to school-based services, one that has been tested, evaluated, and proven a useful means of helping to improve the lives and educational potential of children and their families.

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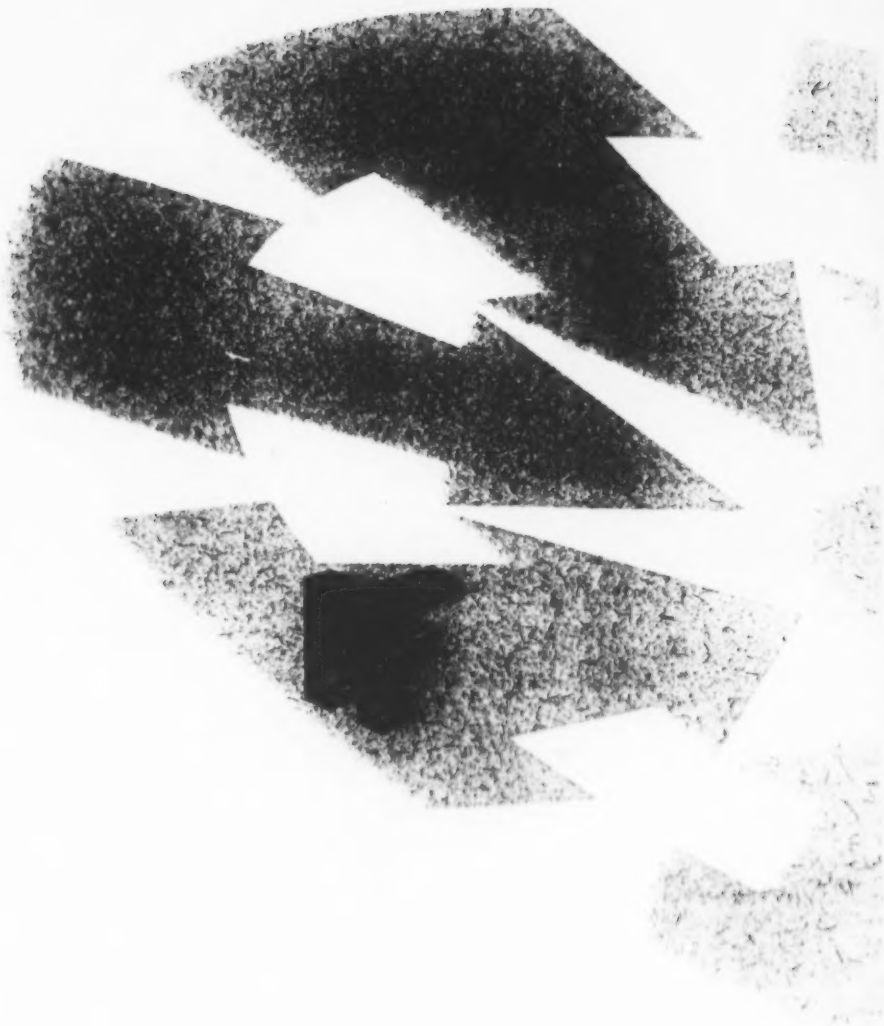
Additional School of the Future publications:

The Project Coordinators: A Key to the School of the Future
A Community Catalyst — Austin
A Blueprint for School-Based Services — Dallas
The Health Clinic — Houston
Parent Volunteer Program — San Antonio

Single copies of the booklets listed are available without charge from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, P.O. Box 7998, Austin, TX 78713. For multiple copies, contact the Research Director, School of the Future Project.



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